

THE LAST SHOT

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by FREDERICK PALMER

SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—At their home on the frontier between the Browns and Grays Marta Galland and her mother, entertaining Colonel Westerling of the Grays, see Captain Lanstron, staff intelligence officer of the Browns, injured by a fall in his aeroplane.

CHAPTER II—Ten years later. Westerling, nominal vice but real chief of staff, reinforces South La Tir, meditates on war, and speculates on the comparative ages of himself and Marta, who is visiting in the Gray Capital.

CHAPTER III—Westerling calls on Marta. She tells him of her teaching children the follies of war and martial patriotism, begs him to prevent war while he is chief of staff, and predicts that if he makes war against the Browns he will not win.

CHAPTER IV—On the march with the 53rd of the Browns Private Stransky, anarchist, decries war and played-out patriotism and is placed under arrest. Colonel Lanstron overhears, begs him off saying the anarchist will fight well when enraged and is "all man."

CHAPTER V—Lanstron calls on Marta at her home. He talks with Feller, the gardener. Marta tells Lanstron that she believes Feller to be a spy. Lanstron confesses it is true.

CHAPTER VI—Lanstron shows Marta a telephone which Feller has concealed in a secret passage under the tower for use to benefit the Browns in war emergencies, pointing out its value as being in the center of the fighting zone in case of war. Marta consents for it and Feller to remain for the present. Lanstron declares his love for Marta.

CHAPTER VII—Westerling and the Gray premier plan to use a trivial international affair to form warlike patriotism in army and people and striking before declaring war. Partow, Brown chief of staff, and Lanstron, made vice, discuss the trouble, and the Brown defenses. Partow reveals his plans to Lanstron.

CHAPTER VIII—At the frontier the two armies lie crouched for attack and defense. In the town with the non-combatants fleeing from the danger zone. Martha hears her child pupils recite the peace oath.

CHAPTER IX—The Gray army crosses the boarder line and attacks. The Browns check them. Artillery, infantry, aeroplanes, dirigibles engage. Stransky, rising to make the anarchist speech of his life, draws the Gray artillery fire. Nicked by a shrapnel splinter he goes Berserk and fights—"all a man."

CHAPTER X—Martha has her first glimpse of war in its modern, cold, scientific, murderous brutality. She allows the telephone to remain.

CHAPTER XI—The Browns fall back to the Galland house. Stransky forages. Martha sees a night attack.

CHAPTER XII—The Grays attack in force. The call of the fight too strong for Feller, he leaves his secret telephone and goes back to his guns. Hand to hand fighting. The Browns fall back again.

Delicious morsel, this, to a connoisseur in compliments! He tasted it with the same self-satisfied smile that he had her first prophecy. To her who had then voiced a secret he had shared with no one, as his chest swelled with a full breath, he bared another in the delight of the impression he had made on her.

"Yes, as you foresaw—as I planned!" he said. "Yes, I planned all, step by step, till I was chief of staff and ready. I convinced the premier that it was time to strike and I chose the hour to strike. Bodlapoo was only a convenient excuse for the last of all the steps."

The sensitive enjoyment of the declaration set him from any keen notice of the effect of his words. Lanny was right. It had been a war of deliberate conquest; a war to gratify personal ambition. All her life Marta would be able to live over again the feelings of this moment. It was as if she were frozen, all except brain nerves, which were on fire, while rigidity of ice kept her from seeing from her chair in contempt and terror. But a purpose came on the face of diabolical temptation which would lift the art of woman against the power of a man who set millions against millions in slaughter to gratify personal ambition. She was thankful that she was looking down as she spoke, for she could not bring herself to another compliment. Her throat was too chilled for that yet.

"The one way to end the feud between the two nations was a war that would mean permanent peace," he ex-

plained, "seeing how quiet she was and realizing, with a recollection of her children's oath, that he had gone a little too far. He wanted to retain her admiration. It had become as precious to him as a new delicacy to Lucullus. "Yes, I understand," she managed to murmur; then she was able to look up. "It's all so immense!" she added. "Your ideas about war seem to be a great deal changed," he hinted casually.

"As I expressed them at the hotel, you mean?" she exclaimed. "That seems ages ago—ages!" The perplexity and indecision that, in a space of silence, brooded in the depths of her eyes came to the surface in wavering lights. "Yes, ages! ages!" The wavering lights grew dim with a kind of horror and she looked away fixedly at a given point.

He was conscious of a thrill; the thrill that always presaged victory for him. He realized her evident distress; he guessed that terrible pictures were moving before her vision.

"You see, I have been very much stirred up," she said half apologetically. "There are some questions I want to ask—quite practical, selfish questions. You might call them questions of property and mercy. The longer the war lasts the greater will be the loss of life and the misery!"

"Yes, for both sides; and the heavier the expense and the taxes."

"If you win, then we shall be under your flag and pay taxes to you?"

"Yes, naturally."

"The Browns do not increase in population; the Grays do rapidly. They are a great, powerful, civilized race. They stand for civilization!"

"Yes, facts and the world's opinion agree," he replied. Puzzled he might well be by this peculiar catechism. He could only continue to reply until he should see where she was leading.

"And your victory will mean a new frontier, a new order of international relations and a long peace, you think? Peace—a long peace?"

Was there ever a soldier who did not fight for peace? Was there ever a call for more army-corps or guns that was not made in the name of peace? He had his ready argument, spoken with the forcible conviction of an expert.

"This war was made for peace—the only kind of peace that there can be," he said. "My ambition, if any glory comes to me out of this war, is to have later generations say: 'He brought peace!'"

Though the premier, could he have heard this, might have smiled, even grinned, he would have understood Westerling's unconsciousness of inconsistency. The chief of staff had set himself a task in victory which had no military connection. Without knowing why, he wanted to win ascendancy over his mind.

"The man of action!" exclaimed Marta, her eyes opening very wide, as they would to let in the light when she heard something new that pleased her or gave food for thought. "The man of action, who thinks of an ideal as a thing not of words but as the end of action!"

"Exactly!" said Westerling, sensible of another of her gifts. She could get the essence of a thing in a few words. "When we have won and set another frontier, the power of our nation will be such in the world that the Browns can never afford to attack us," he went on. "Indeed, no two of the big nations of Europe can afford to make war without our consent. We shall be the arbiters of international discussions. We shall command peace—yes, the peace of force, of fact! If it could be won in any other way I should not be here on this veranda in command of an army of invasion. That was my idea—for that I planned."

He was making up for having overshoot himself in his confession that he had brought on the war as a final step for his ambition.

"You mean that you can gain peace by propaganda and education only when human nature has so changed that we can have law and order and heroes are safe from burglary and pedestrians from pickpockets without policemen? Is that it?" she asked.

"Yes, yes! You have it! You have found the wheat in the chaff."

"Perhaps because I have been seeing something of human nature—the human nature of both the Browns and the Grays at war. I have seen the Browns throwing hand-grenades and the Grays in wanton disorder in our dining-room directly they were out of touch with their officers!" she said sadly, as one who hates to accept disillusionment but must in the face of logic.

Westerling made no reply except to nod, for a movement on her part occupied him. She leaned forward, as she had when she had told him he would become chief of staff, her hands clasped over her knee, her eyes burning with a question. It was the attitude of the prophecy. But with the prophecy she had been a little mystical; the fire in her eyes had precipitated an idea. Now it forged another question.

"And you think that you will win?" she asked. "You think that you will

win?" she repeated with the slow emphasis which demands a careful answer.

The deliberateness of his reply was in keeping with her mood. He was detached; he was a referee.

"Yes, I know that we shall. Numbers make it so, though there be no choice of skill between the two sides."

His tone had the confidence of the flow of a mighty river in its destination on its way to the sea. There was nothing in it of prayer, of hope, of desperation, as there had been in Lanstron's "We shall win!" spoken to her in the arbor at their last interview. She drew forward slightly in her chair. Her eyes seemed much larger and nearer to him. They were sweeping him up and down as if she were seeing the slim figure of Lanstron in contrast to Westerling's sturdiness; as if she were measuring the might of the five millions behind him and the three millions behind Lanstron. She let go a half-whispered "Yes!" which seemed to reflect the conclusion gained from the power of his presence.

"Then my mother's and my own interests are with you—the interests of peace are with you!" she declared.

She did not appear to see the sudden, uncontrolled gleam of victory in his eyes. By this time it had become a habit for Westerling to wait silently for her to come out of her abstractions. To disturb one might make it unproductive.

"Then if I want to help the cause of peace I should help the Grays!"

The exclamation was more to herself than to him. He was silent. This girl in a veranda chair desiring to aid him and his five million bayonets and four thousand guns! Quixote and the windmills—but it was amazing; it was fine! The golden glow of the sunset was running in his veins in a paean of personal triumph. The profile turned ever so little. Now it was looking at the point where Dellarme had lain dying. Westerling noted the smile playing on the lips. It had the quality of a smile over a task completed—Dellarme's smile. She started; she was trembling all over in the resistance of some impulse—some impulse that gradually gained headway and at last broke its bonds.

"For I can help—I can help!" she cried out, turning to him in wild indecision which seemed to plead for guidance. "It's so terrible—yet if it would hasten peace—I know much of the Browns' plan of defense! I know where they are strong in the first line and—and one place where they are weak there—and a place where they are weak in the main line!"

"You do!" Westerling exploded. The plans of the enemy! The plans that neither Bouchard's saturnine cunning, nor bribes, nor spies could ascertain! It was like the bugle-call to the hunter. But he controlled himself. "Yes, yes!" He was thoughtful and guarded.

"Do you think it is right to tell?" Marta gasped half inarticulately.

"Right? Yes, to hasten the inevitable—to save lives!" declared Westerling with deliberate assurance.

"I want to see an end of the killing! I—" She sprang to her feet as if about to break away tumultuously, but paused, swaying unsteadily, and jessed her hand across her eyes.

"We intend a general attack on the first line of defense tonight!" he exclaimed, his supreme thought leaping into words.

"And you would want the information about the first line to-night if—if it is to be of service?"

"Yes, to-night!"

Marta brought her hands together in a tight clasp. Her gaze flutered for a minute over the tea-table. When she looked up her eyes were calm.

"It is a big thing, isn't it?" she said. "A thing not to be done in an impulse. I try never to do big things in an impulse. When I see that I am in danger of it I always say: 'Go by yourself and think for half an hour!' So I must now. In a little while I will let you know my decision."

Without further formality she started across the lawn to the terrace steps. Westerling watched her sharply, passing along the path of the second terrace, pacing slowly, head bent, until she was out of sight. Then he stood for a time getting a grip on his own emotions before he went into the house.

CHAPTER XV.

In Feller's Place.

What am I? What have I done? What am I about to do? shot as forked shadows over the hot lava-flow of Marta's impulse. The vitality that Westerling had felt by suggestion from a still profile rejoiced in a quickening of pace directly she was out of sight of the veranda. All the thinking she had done that afternoon had been in pictures; some saying, some cry, some groan, or some smile went with every picture.

The sitting-room of the tower was empty to other eyes but not to hers. The lantern was in the corner at hand. After her hastening steps had carried



"I Want to See an End of the Killing."

her along the tunnel to the telephone, she set down the lantern and pressed the spring that opened the panel door. Another moment and she would be embarked on her great adventure in the finality of action. That little ear-piece became a specter of conscience. She drew back convulsively and her hands flew to her face; she was a rocking shadow in the thin, reddish light of the lantern.

Conscious mind had torn off the mask from subconscious mind, revealing the true nature of the change that war had wrought in her. She who had resented Feller's part—what a part she had been playing! Every word, every shade of expression, every telling pause of abstraction after Westerling confessed that he had made war for his own ends had been subtly prompted by a purpose whose actuality terrified her.

Her hypocrisy, she realized, was as black as the wall of darkness beyond the lantern's gleam. Then this demoralization passed, as a nightmare passes, with Westerling's boast again in her ears.

When war's principles, enacted by men, were based on sinister trickery called strategy and tactics, should not women, using such weapons as they had, also fight for their homes? Marta's hands swept down from her eyes; she was on fire with resolution.

Forty miles away a bell in Lanstron's bedroom and at his desk rang simultaneously. At the time he and Partow were seated facing each other across a map on the table of the room where they worked together. No persuasion of the young vice-chief, edict of the doctors, could make the old chief take exercise or shorten his hours.

"I know. I know myself!" he said. "I know my duty. And you are learning, my boy, learning!"

Every day the flabby cheeks grew pastier and the pouches under the eyebrows heavier. But there was no dimming of the eagle flashes of the eyes, no weakening of the will. Last night Lanstron had turned as white as chalk when Partow staggered on rising from the table, the veins on his temples knotted blue whip-cords. Yet after a few hours' sleep he reappeared with firm step, fresh for the fray.

The paraphernalia around these two was the same as that around Westerling. Only the atmosphere of the staff was different. Each man was performing the part set for him. No man knew much of any other man's part. Partow alone knew all, and Lanstron was trying to grasp all and praying that Partow's old body should still feed his mind with energy. Lanstron was thinner and paler, a new and glittering intensity in his eyes.

When word of Feller's defection came, Lanstron realized for the first time by Partow's manner that the old chief of staff, with all his deprecation of the telephone scheme as chimerical, had grounded a hope on it.

"There was the chance that we might know—so vital to the defense—what they were going to do before and not after the attack," he said.

Yet the story of how Feller yielded to the temptation of the automatic had made the nostrils of the old war-horse quiver with a dramatic breath, and instead of the command of a battery of guns, which Lanstron had promised, the chief made it a battalion. He had drawn down his brows when he heard that Marta had asked that the wire be left intact; he had shot a shrewd, questioning glance at Lanstron and then beat a tattoo on the table and half grinned as he grumbled under his breath:

"She is afraid of being lonesome! No harm done!"

A week had passed since the Grays had taken the Galland house, and still no word from Marta. The ring of the bell brought Lanstron to his feet with a startled, boyish bound.

"Very springy, that tendon of Achilles!" muttered Partow. "And, my boy, take care, take care!" he called suddenly in his sonorous voice, as vast and billowy as his body.

It was Marta's voice and yet not Marta's, this voice that beat in nervous waves over the wire.

"Lanny—Yes, I, Lanny! You were right. Westerling planned to make war deliberately to satisfy his ambition.

He told me so. The first general attack on the first line of defense is tonight. Westerling says so!" She had to pause for breath. "And, Lanny, I want to know 'some position of the Browns which is weak—not actually weak, maybe, but some position where the Grays expect terrible resistance and will not find it—where you will let them in!'"

"In the name of—Marta! Marta, what—"

"I am going to fight for the Browns—for my home!"

In the sheer satisfaction of explaining herself to herself, of voicing her sentiments, she sent the pictures which had wrought the change moving across the screen before Lanstron's amazed vision. There was no room for interruption on his part, no question or

"She asked for it now."

"Why?" demanded Partow with one of his shrewd, piercing looks. "She did not say, but I can guess," explained Lanstron. "She must put all her cards on the table; she must tell Westerling all she knows at once. If she tells him piecemeal it might lead to the supposition that she still had some means of communication with the Browns."

"Of course, of course!" Partow spat the flat of his hand resoundingly on the map. "As I decided the first time I met her, she has a head, and when a woman has a head for that sort of thing there is no beating her. Well—" he was looking straight into Lanstron's eyes. "Well, I think we know the point where we could draw them in on the main line, eh?"

"Up the apron of the approach from the Engadri valley. We yield the advance redoubts on either side."

"Meanwhile, we have massed heavily behind the redoubt. We retake the advance redoubts in a counter-attack and—" Partow brought his fist into his palm with a smack.

"Yes, if we could do that! If we could get them to expend their attack there!" put in Lanstron very excitedly for him.

"We must! She shall help!" Partow was on his feet. He had reached across the table and seized Lanstron's shoulders in a powerful if flesh-padded grip. Then he turned Lanstron around toward the door of his bedroom and gave him a mighty slap of affection. "My boy, the brightest hope of victory we have is holding the wire for you. Tell her that a bearded old behemoth, who can kneel as gracefully as a rheumatic rhinoceros, is on both knees at her feet, kissing her hands and trying his best, in the name of mercy, to keep from breaking into verse of his own composition."

Back at the telephone, Lanstron, in the fervor of the cheer and the enthusiasm that had transported his chief, gave Marta Partow's message.

"You, Marta, are our brightest hope of victory!"

"Yes!" the monosyllable was detached, dismal, labored. "A woman can be that!" she exclaimed in an uncertain tone, which grew into the distraction of clipped words and broken sentences. "A woman play-acting—a woman acting the most revolting hypocrisy—influences the issue between two nations! Her deceit deals in the lives of sons precious to fathers and mothers, the fate of frontiers, of institutions costing countless millions—machines of flesh and blood, with their destinies shaped by one little bit of lying information! Think of the folly of any civilization that stakes its triumphs on such a gamble! Am I not right? Isn't it true? Isn't it?"

"Yes, yes, Marta! But—I—" If she were weakening it was not his place to try to strengthen her purpose. "It will the sooner end fighting, won't it, Lanny?" she asked in a small, tense voice.

"Yes."

"And the only real end that means real peace is to prove that the weak can hold back the strong from their threshold?"

"Yes."

Even now Westerling might be on the veranda, perhaps waiting for news that would enable him to crush the weak; to prove that the law of five pounds of human flesh against three, and five bayonets against three, is the law of civilization.

"Yes, yes, yes!" The constriction was gone from her throat; there was a drum-beat in her soul. "Depend on me, Lanny!" It was Feller's favorite phrase spoken by the one who was to take his place. "Yes, I'm ready to make any sacrifice now. For what am I? What is one woman compared to such a purpose? I don't care what is said of me or what becomes of me if we can win! Good-by, Lanny, till I call you up again! And God with us!"

"God with us!" as Partow had said, over and over. The saying had come to be repeated by hard-headed, agnostic staff-officers, who believed that the deity had no relation to the efficiency of gun-fire. The Brown infantrymen even were beginning to mutter it in the midst of action.

Waiting on the path of the second terrace for Westerling to come, Marta realized the full meaning of her task. Day in and day out she was to have suspense at her elbow and the horror of hypocrisy on her conscience, the while keeping her wits nicely balanced. When she saw Westerling appear on the veranda and start over the lawn she felt dizzy and uncertain of her capabilities.

"I have considered all that you have said for my guidance and I have decided," she began.

She heard her own voice with the relief of a singer in a debut who, with knees shaking, finds that her notes are true. She was looking directly at Westerling in profound seriousness. Though knees shook, lips and chin

could aid eyes in revealing the painful fatigue of a battle that had raged in the mind of a woman who went away for half an hour to think for herself.

"I have concluded," she went on, "that it is an occasion for the sacrifice of private ethics to a great purpose, the sooner to end the slaughter."

"All true!" whispered an inner voice. Its tone was Lanny's, in the old days of their comradeship. It gave her strength. All true!

To be continued

SPENCER

The entertainment given by the high school Saturday evening, was well attended, the receipts being \$42. The plays were presented very well and showed faithful work by both the teachers and the pupils.

The schools were dismissed Thursday afternoon for a weeks vacation. The W. H. M. S. met with Mrs. J. H. Firestone Friday afternoon. Garments were finished for the barrel which was sent to Cleveland Tuesday.

Mrs. Wesley Brouse and family moved to her new home on Forest avenue this week.

THE POULTRY FLOCK

If new stock is needed in the spring, now is the best time to buy. Birds that will be large enough in the spring to make satisfactory breeders are sufficiently developed now to show their quality, and there are several good reasons for early buying. The majority of breeders prefer to move out their surplus stock as early as possible, in order to give their own stock more room. They make better prices on good stuff now than they can afford to make later in the season. Having the birds in your possession, you can give them the winter care that is essential to their best development, and can rest assured that you are breeding from healthy stock.

Roots of all kinds can be fed cooked or raw, but they should be chopped fine.

A light morning feed for the flock is better because it keeps them hustling through the day.

That hens must be fed and fed liberally if one expects eggs in large quantities, especially winter eggs.

SUCCESSFUL DAIRYING

If one expects success in dairying, follow the methods of successful dairymen. The question of good management of milk cows has been settled to the satisfaction of all dairymen and farmers, who have experimented in many ways to learn what is the best thing to do to produce milk rich in butter fat, in the greatest quantity, and at the lowest cost price. This end has been reached only when all the conditions, viz: good cows, comfortable stabling, food in the proper quantity and the right variety, some exercises in fair and pleasant weather in open, clean lots, and an abundance of drinking water at regular intervals.

CARE OF AUTOMOBILE TIRES

The professor in charge of automobiles and other motors at the Nebraska College of Agriculture offers the following suggestions regarding the care of automobile tires.

The large percentage of tire trouble is due to lack of sufficient air pressure. Pressure should be maintained at 20 pounds per inch of tire diameter. Thus, a four-inch tire should have a pressure of 80 pounds. The heating of the tire when in use should not be depended upon to increase the air pressure sufficiently if it is much less than that required at the time of starting.

There is little danger of having too high a pressure on a new tire, as ever average sized tire is tested to 200 pounds before being sold.

If tires are old, judgment must be used in maintaining the normal pressure. If two strands of the fabric are left, however, the pressure of 20 pounds per inch of diameter may be maintained.

Tires should always be kept from the direct rays of the sun when possible. Effort should be made to keep the surface of the fabric of the rubber fire-dough is useful in keeping out of the cracks and is not very expensive.

BUYING OLD HENS

If you add to your flock, be sure that the hens you procure do not bring lice or disease with them. If the plumage is smoky, with some of the feathers straggly or broken, it indicates that the hens have not moulted.

Be gently on the nostrils, and if there is the slightest discharge, the hens are verging on roup. The combs should be a bright red and the legs clean. Never buy a fowl from a yard where cholera or roup has once appeared.

Children Cry
FOR FLETCHER'S
CASTORIA